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ABSTRACT

One prediction derived from observational learning theory is that children learn parental-role behaviors by observing parental models. Variables which strongly influence behavior acquisition and performance during observational learning are the behavioral consequences of an action, and the sex of the behavioral model. To evaluate the effects of these variables and the effect of reward-incentives on the ability to recall modeled punitive parental behaviors, girls between the ages of 6 and 8 (N=24) watched one of two films dipicting a father, mother, and child interacting at the dinner table. Half the girls saw a father-punitive, mother-neutral dyad, while the others observed a mother-punitive, father-neutral dyad. Each child then reported as many of the modeled parental behaviors as possible, first without incentives, then with incentives for additional behaviors recalled. Results showed that the girls recalled the punitive model's behavior more than the neutral model's, regardless of the model's sex or the presence or absence of incentives. However, providing incentives increased recall of both punitive and neutral behaviors, although punitive behaviors were most affected. The male-punitive, female-neutral dyad was particularly salient, but only in the incentive condition. The findings support earlier research conclusions that children observe and learn behaviors of same and opposite sex models with equal proficiency. (Author/WAS)

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Punitive Parents as Models:
Effects of Reward-incentives and Sex of Model on Recall of Punitive Parental Behaviors

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Abstract

In an evaluation of the effects of reward-incentives and sex of model on the ability to recall modeled punitive parental behaviors, 24 girls between the ages of six and eight years were shown one of two films depicting a father, mother and child interacting at the dinner table. Half the subjects saw a father-punitive mother-neutral dyad while the others observed a mother-punitive father-neutral dyad. Each child was then asked to report as many of the modeled parental behaviors as possible -- first without incentives and then with incentives provided for additional behaviors recalled. Results showed that recall of the punitive parent-model's behavior was greater than that of the neutral model, regardless of the sex of the model or the presence or absence of incentive. However, providing incentives increased recall of both punitive and neutral behaviors, although punitive behaviors were most affected. It was also found that the male-punitive female-neutral dyad was particularly salient, with recall of both punitive and neutral behaviors being significantly greater, but only when incentives were offered. Findings are discussed within the context of an observational learning model.

Punitive Parents as Models:

Effects of and Reward-incentives and Sex of Model on

Recall of Punitive Parental Behavior

One prediction derived from Bandura's theory of observational learning is that children learn parental-role behaviors by observing parental models. For example, if parental control is punitive then children might be expected to learn punitive discipline behaviors through observation and parhaps later to display this form of parenting with their own offspring. Support for this possibility has been provided by Hoffman (1960) who found that children do, in fact, reproduce punitive behaviors exhibited by their parents and by Lefkowitz, Huessman & Eron (1978) whose longitudinal research suggests that children, particularly females, may discipline their own children in a manner similar to that by which they themselves were disciplined.

Two variables, in particular, influence both acquisition and later performance during observational learning. The first of these variables is the behavioral consequences of an action. Bandura (1965) has shown that observers rarely imitate modeled behavior that is negatively sanctioned or associated with punishment unless directly reinforced for doing so. Thus in a study by Fairchild and Erwin (1977), boys who had observed punitive parent models exhibited fewer imitative responses than did a control group observing non-punitive models. Furthermore, those youngsters viewing punitive-parent models were generally less responsive, expressed fewer happy story themes in a story completion task, and displayed significantly more "aggressive mischief"

(a passive indirect form of aggression) in their play. However, Fairchild and Erwin differ with observational learning theorists inasmuch as they suggest that factors related to "frustration aggression" rather than behavioral consequence most directly affect actual performance of modeled behavior.

A second variable that must also be considered is sex of the model. In research by Chartier & Weiss (1974) the model's gender was shown to interact with behavioral consequence in the following ways: When a male adult controlled rewards and punishments, boys and girls with whom he interacted imitated his behavior more frequently than that of a neutral model only when the model actually issued rewards. However, when a female model controlled rewards and punishers, boys and girls with whom she interacted reproduced her behavior more often than the neutral model's behavior regardless of whether she dispensed rewards or punishers.

In the present study three questions were asked: (a) Will children learn more from a punitive parent model than a neutral model? (b) Are children more likely to report observed behavior, particularly punitive behavior, when incentives are offered for doing so, and (c) does sex of the model affect observational learning from parent models?

Method

Subjects. Twenty-three girls enrolled in a first-grade class and one girl from a kindergarten class at a public elementary school located in a Southern metropolitan area served as subjects. The subjects ranged in age from six years three months to eight years five months (M=6.90 years, SD= 1.25). Only girls were tested because previous research (e.g., Lefkowitze et al., 1978) has shown that performance of punitive parental behaviors learned

through observation is less affected by variables such as aggressiveness and social-economic class when female subejcts are used. With this in mind, the following information on selected background variables was obtained from teachers' reports: Sixteen of the girls were from middle income families, six from low income families, and two from upper income families. Eight of the children were from one parent households. Academically, five girls were classified as "gifted," one as "emotionally disturbed" and the remaining eighteen as "average" or "above average." Overall, the variations in all three area. are what one would expect from a sampling of the selected population.

Materials. Two videotaped films approximately two minutes in length were shown. The films depicted a mother, father, and seven-year-old girl seated around a table eating a meal. One parent in each film reacted to the child's behaviors (e.g., wriggling in chair, not eating her food, playing with and then dropping her fork) in a punitive manner while the other parent exhibited only neutral behaviors. In one film version the father exhibited punitive behavior while in the second, which was identical in every other respect, the mother played the punitive role. The roles of mother, father and child were played by a real family with amateur acting experience. The films were in black and white.

Each parent exhibited a total of eight non-verbal behaviors (e.g., pouring water from a pitcher, shaking finger at child) and eight verbal behaviors (e.g., "The news will be on TV in a little while." "You're so clumsy"). Punitive behaviors were based on those described in earlier reaserch (Hoffman, 1960; Fairchild & Erwin, 1977) while neutral behaviors were limited to those having no consequence to the child (see Mischel & Grusac,

1966a).

Other materials included a checklist for recording the child's recall of modeled behavior and audiotape equipment used to record all comments made during the post-film interview. The latter provided a basis for independent scoring of the child's responses and subsequent estimate of interrater reliability.

Pilot study. In a preliminary study, five additional subjects ranging in age from five to eight years viewed the films. Two girls viewed the male-punitive film and three the female-punitive film. All youngsters were asked a series of quetions pertaining to the films. Of particular importance were a pair of questions meant to determine the effectiveness of the punitive actions depicted by the models. These questions were: "Did the girl get punished a little or a lot?" and "Would it bother you a little or a lot to punished like that?" While no definite trends were found in judgements of severity of the punishements, 4 of 5 children agreed that they would be "bothered a lot" if punished in a similar manner.

Procedure. Each child was taken individually from her classroom and escorted to the experimental setting. During this time one of two female experimenters engaged in friendly conversation in order to put the child at ease. Once in the experimental setting, the experimenter informed the child that they would watch a short movie on TV together, after which another lady would come in to play a game with the child. Half the girls were randomly selected to view the male-punitive film while the other half viewed the female-punitive film.

After viewing the appropriate film, each child was told, "Now I'm going

to get the other lady so that you two can play a game together." The second experimenter, unaware of which film the child had watched, was brought in. She greeted the child, engaged in brief friendly conversation, then read the following instructions: "Now we are going to play a game called 'What Do Grown-ups Say and Do?' To play the game you tell me everything you can remember that either one of the grown-ups said or did in the film just now, and I'll write them down." Up to three prompts (e.g., "Go ahead," "Think hard," etc.) were provided when the child hesitated. However, no incentives for responding were offered during this preliminary phase of the interview, which ended when the child ceased to respond or when she indicated that she could not recall anything else.

A second "incentive" condition followed immediately. The experimenter showed the child a piece of white construction paper on which a large red happy face was drawn with the child's name beneath. The experimenter continued, "Now I want to see if there is anything else that you can tell me that either one of the grown-ups on TV said or did. I'm going to put a gold star around the happy face every time you tell me something else that either one of the grown-ups said or did." Gold stars and verbal praise were provided whenever the child recalled a modeled behavior not previously reported. As in the first interview phase, three prompts were offered as needed and the interview ended when the child ceased to respond or when she indicated that she could not recall anything else. Finally, in an attempt to determine the reward value of the stars, each child was asked whether she liked the gold stars and whether she liked them a little or a lot. All youngsters replied that they liked getting the stars a lot.

Several post-interview procedures were carried out to assure that viewing the film had no detrimental effects on the child and that the overall experimental procedure was viewed as a positive experience. First, because four out of five subjects participating in the pilot study had indicated that they would be bothered "a lot" if punished like the girl in the film, a debriefing procedure was used. While accompanying the child back to her classroom after testing, the experimenter explained that the events they had just seen in the film were not real and that parents and child were just acting. The experimenter tried to reinforce the fact that the movie was just pretend by comments such as "I think that little girl was a very good actress, don't you?" Second, rewards were equally distributed to all participants in several ways. To begin with, each child was informed that she was very good at playing the Grown-up game and the experimenter rubber-stamped "very good" on the child's paper. Then at the end of the last day of testing the children's "happy faces" were returned through the teacher, all displaying six gold stars.

Results

To obtain an estimate of scoring reliability, subjects' responses during both phases of the interview were scored independently by the two experimenters. The interviewer herself scored the child's responses as they were given, while the second experimenter rescored all protocols one month later from audiotapes. Interrater correlations (Pearson's r) ranged from .82 to .99 and all were significant at or beyond the .001 level.

The data were subjected to "profile analyses" (Harris, 1975), a multivariate technique that assesses between-group similarity among several

different measures. This technique was chosen over a standard repeated measures ANOVA because the comparisons of interest were between pre-incentive scores and "post-incentive" scores -- the latter being comprised of the sum of both number of pre-incentive behaviors recalled and number of additional behaviors recalled during the incentive condition. Profile analysis makes no assumptions regarding the independence of error terms (a condition not met with regard to these two measures), yet yields components analogous to the standard ANOVA technique. Three profile analyses were performed: The first used means for recall of modeled punitive behavior, comparing pre- versus post-incentive measures, and the interaction of groups and measures effects. The second provided the same comparisons for neutral behaviors only. The third analysis used mean recall for additional punitive and neutral behaviors reported in the incentive condition only, comparing punitive versus neutral modeled behaviors and the interaction of model-category and groups effects. Data for the first profile analysis is presented in Figure 1. Results showed that recall of modeled punitive behavior was significantly greater after incentives were offered, $F(1,22)=26.2$, $p<.0001$. In addition, a significant interaction was found between sex of the punitive model and pre- and post-incentive measures, $F(1,22) = 7.59$, $p < .02$. Subjects reported many more male-punitive behaviors than female-punitive behaviors, but only after incentives were offered.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Results of the second profile analysis, shown in Figure 2, indicated that recall of modeled neutral behavior was again greater after incentives were provided than before, $F(1,22)=10.16$, $p<.005$. However, no groups effect or groups by recall measure interaction were found.

In addition, when recall of punitive and neutral behaviors were compared for the no-incentive condition only (Figures 1 & 2) it was found that both film groups recalled more punitive than neutral behaviors--$t(11) = 4.03$, $p < .01$ and $t(11) = 3.58$, $p < .01$, respectively.

Insert Figure 2 about here

When recall of punitive and neutral behaviors are compared with film group for the incentive condition only (Figure 3), profile analysis indicated that the number of additional punitive model behaviors reported was greater than additional neutral model behaviors for both film groups, $F(1,22)=6.81$, $p<.02$. Also, children in the male-punitive group reported a significantly greater number of additional modeled behaviors of both types than did those viewing the female-punitive film, $F(1,22)=8.50$, $p<.01$. No significant groups by model category interaction was found.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Closer examination of the data suggested that age might be a confounding factor; viz., ten of twelve subjects in the male-punitive condition were six years eleven months of age or younger while only five of the girls in the female-punitive fell in the age group. Accordingly, the three profile analyses were repeated with subject's age as a covariate. The results were the same as those just described, although in some instances the levels of significance were smaller (all were significant at the .05 level or beyond).

Discussion

Before discussing the present findings, it is important to mention two aspects of this research that differ at times from several of the studies cited. First, a recall measure of performance was used instead of actual imitative behavior (see Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963b, for a justification of recall as a dependent measure in observational learning studies). One possible effect of this approach may have been to supress recall of non-verbal behaviors relative to verbal behaviors displayed in the films. The number of non-verbal to verbal behaviors reported was 12 to 46 in the female-punitive group and 5 to 37 in the male-punitive group, respectively.

A second methodological difference involved the lack of interaction between model and child-observer. Several earlier studies of general modeling behavior (e.g., Mischel & Grusec, 1966a, 1966b; Chartier & Weiss, 1974) and of modeling within the family (e.g., Carroll, 1977; Lefkowitz, Huessman, & Eron, 1978) involved actual interaction between the child and the models. However, it should be clear that even under the conditions imposed in the present study an argument could be made for some form of vicarious

interaction or "identification" with the child-actor.

With these aspects of methodology in mind, we now procede to a discussion of the findings.

The discussion has been organized around the central issues investigated in the present study, namely: (a) reported recall of the behaviors of the two models; (b) the effects of incentives on reported recall of the behaviors of the models; and (c) the effects of sex of the model on recall of the behaviors of the two models.

Recall of modeled behaviors. Subjects in the present study reported greater recall of behaviors of a punitive parent model than of a neutral parent model, regardless of the presence or absence of incentives and regardless of the sex of the model. Since the punitive model dispensed consequences in the filmed sequence, while the neutral model did not, this finding can be considered to support earlier research (Bandura, 1969; Miller & Dollard, 1941; Mischel & Grusex, 1966a) that indicates observers' attention is more likely to be directed at a model with the power to dispence consequences to another, enhancing observational learning from the model.

Effects of incentive on recall. Results of the present study also indicate that incentives enhance recall of modeled behviors, thus lending credence to Fairchild and Erwin's (1977) finding that observation of filmed punitive- parent models may limit children's behavior and reduce their responsive- ness, and to Mischel and Grusec's (1966b) finding that provision of reward- incentives may enhance children's performance and responsiveness in experi- mental tasks. While the present study differed from the Fairchild and Erwin study in several ways, the present findings nonetheless cast doubt on

their assertion that frustrating conditions promote imitation of punitive model behaviors. Rather, the present results indicate that recall of modeled behaviors, particularly punitive model behaviors, can be enhanced by the simple provision of reward-incentives.

Effects of sex of the model on recall. The present findings lend measured support to earlier research conclusions (Perry & Bussey, 1979) that children observe and learn behaviors of same-sex and opposite-sex models with equal proficiency. Although sex of the filmed model did not interact with the type of model behavior observed (punitive vs. neutral) to effect recall prior to the introduction of incentives, results of the present study lead to unexpected conclusions regarding the effect of sex on recall when incentives are offered. Specifically, when offered incentives for report of additional model behaviors recalled, girls viewing a male-punitive, female-neutral pair reported greater recall of a punitive model's behavior than did those viweing the female-punitive, male- neutral pair. Both effects occurred only after incentives were offered for reported recall of additional model behaviors.

Considering Bandura's (1973) argument that observational learning begins with observer's attention being directed toward a model, the findings of differences in recall as a function of the model pairs suggests that the male-punitive, female-neutral pair attracted more attention to both models, thus enhancing recall. It has been argued (Parry & Bussey, 1979) that, as part of the observational learning process, children code various model behaviors as male-appropriate or female-appropriate, and that children's perceptions of the appropriateness of that behavior effects imitation. Likewise, Bandura

(1973) reported data indicating that children observing aggressive female models imitated that model's behavior less and judged her behavior to be uncharacteristic for females. Tentative conclusions drawn from the pilot study indicate the children judged appropriateness of the models' behavior in the filmed sequence by comparing it to that of their own parents. Thus it may be that children in the present study found the male-punitive female-neutral pair similar to their own family structure, and were thus more likely to perceive the model pairs' behavior as appropriate. For this reason they paid more attention to both models in the male-punitive female-neutral dyad and learned more of their behaviors. Further research is necessary to explore the potential effects on recall of children's perceptions of the sex-appropriateness of model behaviors and its relationship to other variables (sex of the child, family role- structure, etc.) not investigated here.

A similar explanation may be offered for the finding that total recall of punitive model behaviors was greater after incentives were distributed to girls viewing a male-punitive female-neutral pair than it was for those viewing a female-punitive, male-neutral pair. Two characteristics of the male-punitive model apparently enhanced observers' attention, each contributing to the effect of greater total recall of the behaviors of the male- punitive model. First, the male-punitive model dispensed consequences, while the neutral model did not. Secondly, his behavior in combination with the female-neutral model attracted more attention, perhaps because of children's perceptions, as discussed earlier. As a result, both initial recall (without incentives) and additional recall (with incentives) was enhanced, leading to greater total recall of the behaviors of the male-punitive model, at least

for first grade girls in the present study. In addition, the present findings parallel those reported earlier (Chartier & Weiss, 1974) in which both boys and girls exhibited more imitative behavior toward a male model who controlled rewards and punishments, but such imitation occurred only when the model dispensed rewards to the children. The present findings similarly indicate that girls in the present study reported greater total recall of the behaviors of a male-punitive model, but greater total recall occurs only after reward-incentives are offered for reported recall of the model behaviors.

Also important to note is the finding that, although selective recall of modeled behaviors occurs relative to the model pairs observed, this effect is seen only when observers are offered incentives for recall of additional model behaviors. Further research seems indicated to explore the selective effects of incentives on both recall and imitation measures of observational learning.

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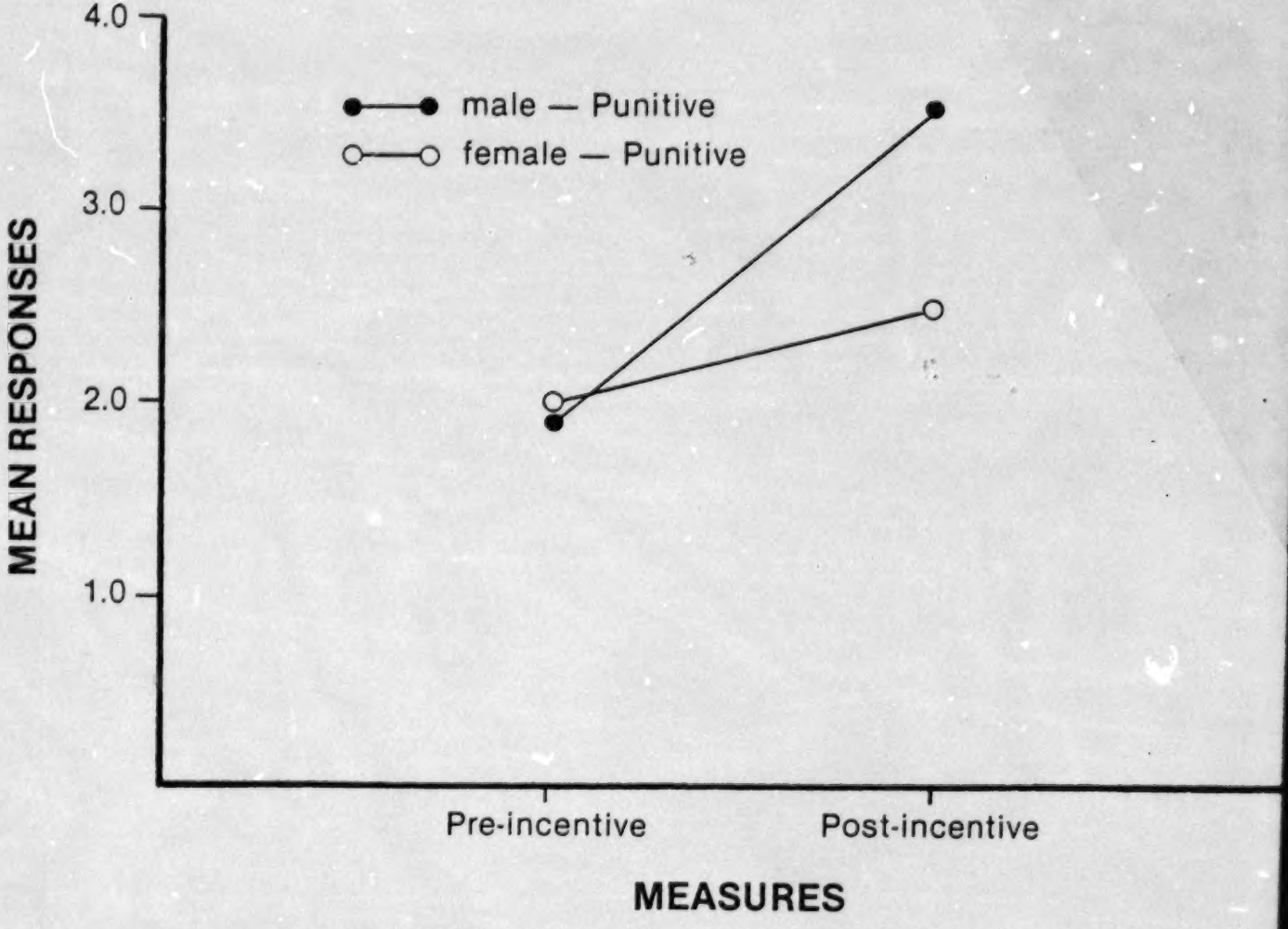
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mean recall of punitive-model behaviors before and after incentives.

Figure 2. Mean recall of neutral-model behaviors before and after incentives.

Figure 3. Additional punitive and neutral model behaviors reported under incentive condition.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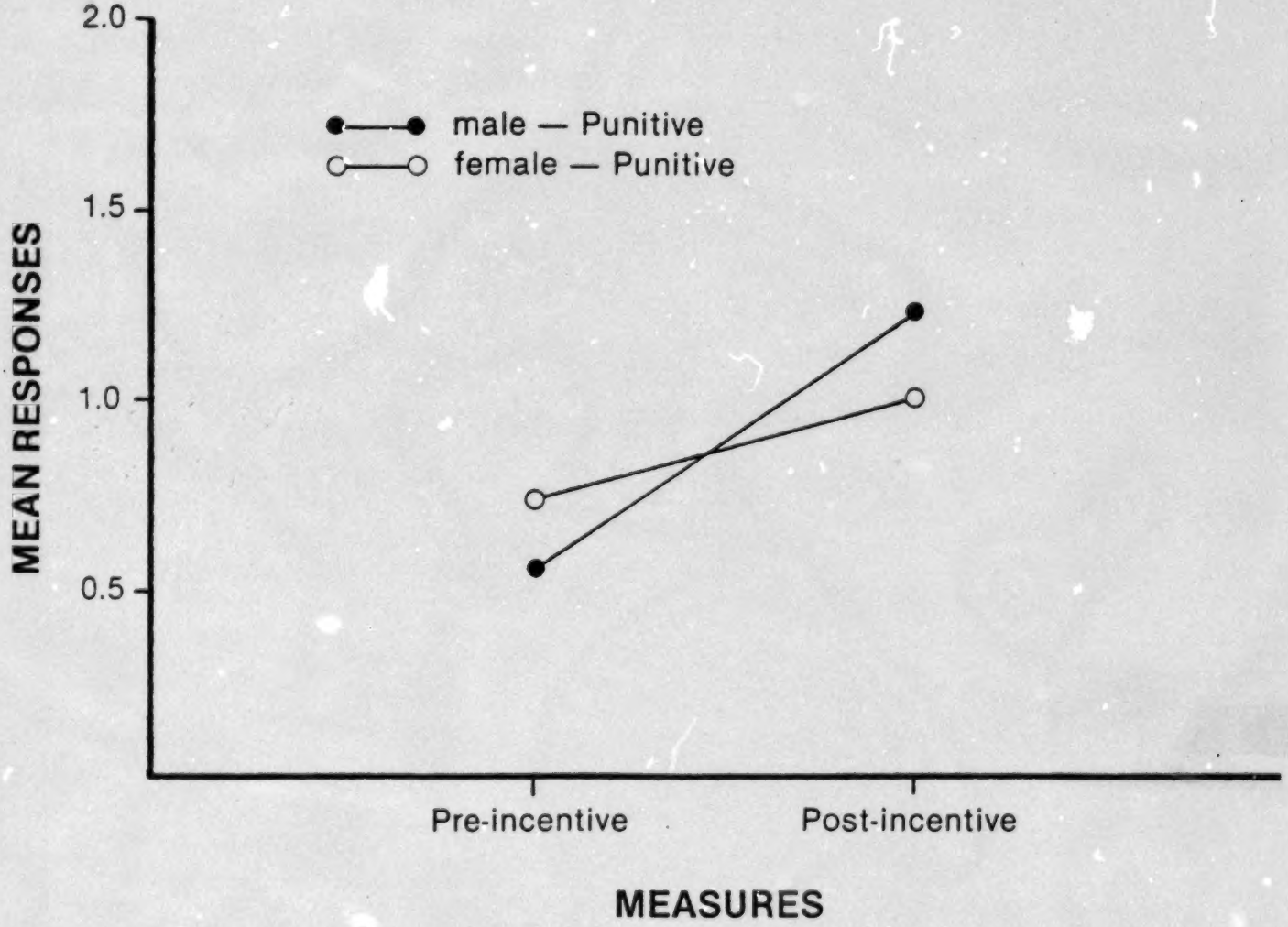
MEAN RESPONSES
male — Punitive
female — Punitive
Pre-incentive
Post-incentive
MEASURES

Figure 1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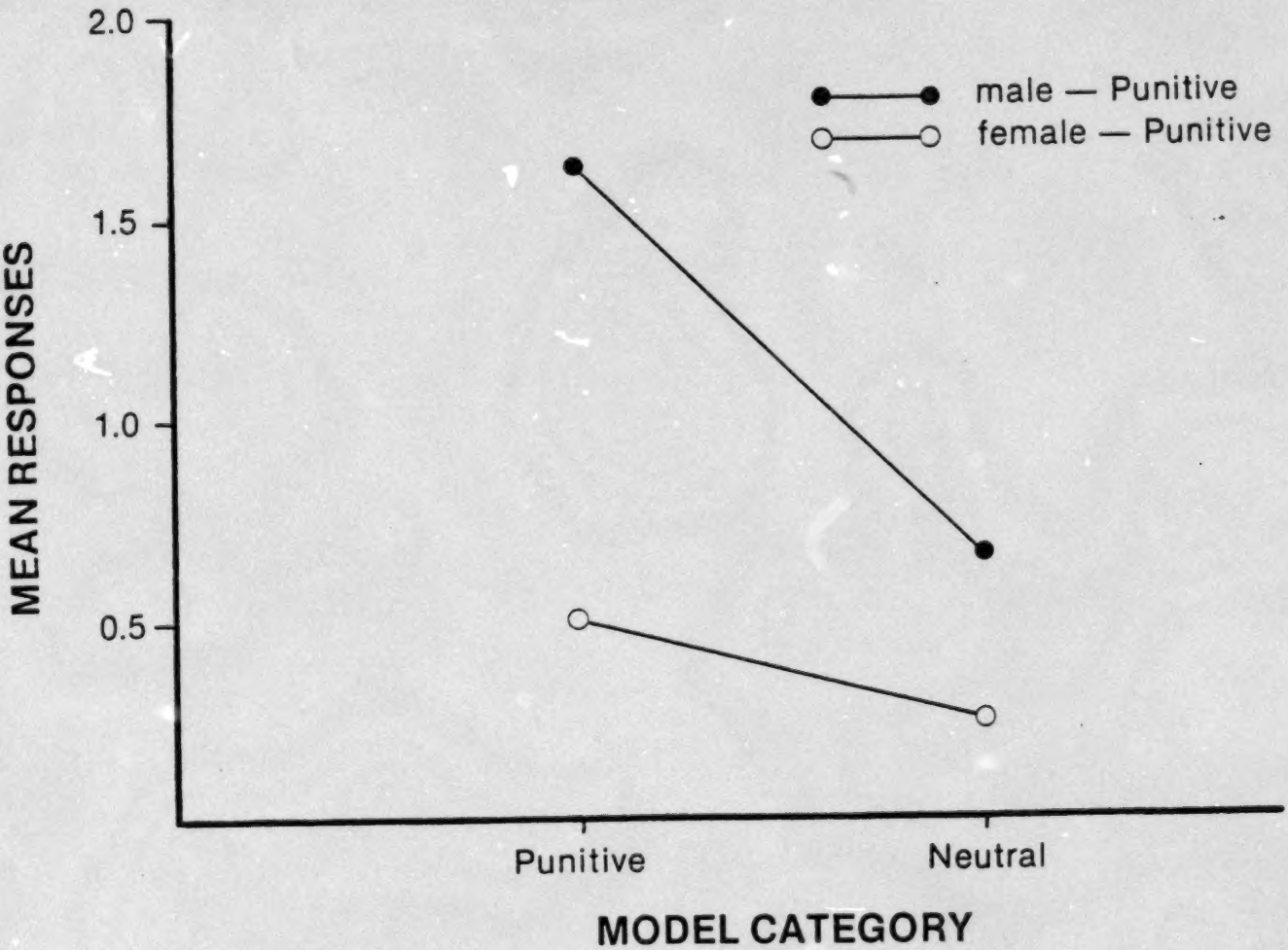
MEAN RESPONSES
male — Punitive
female — Punitive
Pre-incentive
Post-incentive
MEASURES

Figure 2


2.0
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MEAN RESPONSES
male — Punitive
female — Punitive
Punitive
Neutral
MODEL CATEGORY

Figure 3